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SEEDS, OR SEED, IN GAL. 3:16

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In a note in the *Biblical World*, April, 1907, on "Peter or Cephas in Pauline usage," we pointed out the probability that a part of Gal. 2:7, 8, was a very early interpolation into the original text of the epistle. We would now call attention to Gal. 3:16b. "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ."

It has been thought (Irenaeus, Augustine) that the apostle here speaks of Christ in a mystical sense, meaning *Christ and his church*, or even *the Church* alone, and Professor B. W. Bacon (*Jour. Bib. Lit.*, Vol. XVI, p. 139) thinks "the context does suggest the 'one man, Christ Jesus,' of whom both Jews and Gentiles are members, i. e., a collective Christ, in some sense." And he refers to Eph. 2:13-16; Gal. 3:28, and Rom. 4:1-6, as parallel passages.

On the other hand, Meyer holds that "Χριστός is the personal Christ Jesus," and that "the very contrast between πολλῶν and ἐνός is against" this mystical use of Χριστός in a collective sense. Light-foot, we believe, takes substantially the same view.

Neither of the two views is altogether satisfying. It is true that in this same chapter Paul considers the body of believers, whether Jewish or Gentile, as descendants of Abraham's faith, even if not of his loins, and heirs of the promises made to him. This is figurative, but not mystical, and the sharp contrast between "many" and "one" makes such a mystical interpretation, here, impossibly awkward. If, on the other hand, we adopt the natural meaning of the text, namely, that Jesus Christ is the (one) seed of Abraham, as distinguished from Abraham's other descendants, designated by God as the heir to the promises, and in which all the families of the earth were to be blessed, we cannot fail to conclude that Paul takes an unpardonable linguistic liberty, not only with the Greek, wherein σπέρμα, though singular in form, is recognized as collective in sense,

but also, as we understand, with the Hebrew; and that he attempts without reason to reverse the general understanding that Gen., chaps. 12, 15, etc., do in fact refer to the descendants of Abraham collectively as "seed." It is true, of course, that Paul sometimes interprets freely, as for instance in the allegorizing of the story of Sarah and Hagar in this same epistle. But with Irenaeus, Augustine, and Professor Bacon, we cannot think that Paul would insist, from the singular form of the word seed, that its reference must be restricted to one descendant of Abraham, to the exclusion of all others.

From this internal evidence we venture, though recognizing the hazardousness of conjectural emendation unsupported by external evidence, to question the integrity of the passage. The sentence, "He saith not, seeds, etc.," is not a necessary or important part of the argument of the contest. It is at best parenthetical. It is not logically connected, either with what goes before or with what comes after, unless, interpreted in a recondite, mystical, forced, and awkward way, it is opposed to the meaning of the whole chapter. Yet the sentence is there, and as a possible explanation of its presence we conjecture that some very early reader, perhaps of the original letter, noted upon its margin that he (Paul) saith not seeds but seed, and must have meant Christ. If so, then, in subsequent copying the annotation, with its superficial look of piety, but with its real lack of understanding, took its place in the text, after a manner well known to the critic of manuscripts, and has remained there ever since. It may, at least, be said for this view that the psychological process which it ascribes to the copyist is in itself more probable than that which must be ascribed to Paul, if the words belong to the original text.